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**The top school
in the country:
why the right
tie still counts**



PLUS:

**Living in the
most northerly
village on earth**

**The Canadian
who won the
world bowling
championship**

**The new knits:
presenting the
Super-Cardigan**



High noon on the most northern street in the world



**This is Alert,
Northwest
Territories,
Canada, 450
miles from the
Pole, and just
after the
photographer
took this
picture,
he had lunch**

BY PETER MOON

THE FOUR ENGINES of the huge Hercules cargo plane shut down. You zip up your parka as a crewman throws open a door, then you jump down from the plane to the snow-covered runway and, with a helping hand from a bundled up figure waiting below, you stumble through the wind-swept darkness to a big van-like snow vehicle on caterpillar tracks.

Once you've climbed in and warmed up a little, you try to peer through the frosted windows at what is going on in the gloom outside. But you can't see much, for the only illumination is from a weak little moon, low in the sky, and from the lights of other tracked snow vehicles and from some flashlights as the plane is unloaded.

You glance up at the moon but it is 11:30 in the morning, and you have to remind yourself that up here in the Arctic, there is no daylight at all dur-

ing the harsh winter months.

This is Alert, Northwest Territories, at Canada's most northern tip. To your right, 2,580 miles south, is Ottawa. And to your left is the North Pole, only 450 miles over the polar ice cap that begins where the land ends at the edge of the runway.

"I thought this was the Land of the Midnight Sun," you mutter.

"Hell, no," grumps a bearded figure next to you, "this is the goddamned Land of the Noonday Moon."

Here, in a land so bleak that even the Eskimos found it impossible to live in and abandoned it hundreds of years ago, the Canadian Armed Forces operate a base year round. The inhabitants of Alert live closer to the North Pole than any other human beings.

When a serviceman completes his six months' tour of duty at Alert, he takes away \$600 in hardship pay (from

which a grateful government takes income tax) and a certificate that attests to the fact that he has served at the most northern permanent settlement in the world.

The certificate and the money are both earned the hard way. For here on the upper edge of Ellesmere Island, the winter is just about inconceivable to the average Canadian.

The sun disappears completely for 145 days. The thermometer plunges to 50 degrees below zero and winds of up to 100 miles an hour regularly howl through the camp, making it impossible for anyone to step outside a building. Instead, they sit the storms out while they live on emergency rations and dream of home and the two weeks of extra leave they will get when the day comes for them to fly back "down south."

The only way a man can hope to endure conditions like this is to be philo-



sophical about it, realize that it's only for six months, and make up his mind to make the most of it. And it helps to have a sense of humor.

Even the spit 'n' polish generals in their comfortable Ottawa offices have realized this. As a result, Alert is the only place in the world where Canadian soldiers and airmen are allowed to grow beards, alongside sailors who have always enjoyed the traditional right.

Alert came into existence in 1950 when the Canadian and U.S. governments jointly established a small eight-man Arctic weather station (JAWS) on the bare land next to Dumbell Bay, across icebound Robeson Channel from northern Greenland.

The JAWS station has remained in operation. Meantime, the Canadian Armed Forces built a slightly more northerly camp around a radio station which, a prepared statement says, "is

part of a Canadian Forces research program on problems of radio transmission and reception in northern areas."

However, not everything about Alert is written in officialese, particularly the big, hand-painted signs around the camp which never allow you to forget that Alert is just about the most northerly *everything* in the world. Outside the cookhouse is a sign that says: "The Igloo Gardens Restaurant, featuring muskox steak, lemming meringue pie. World's most northerly dining room, ladies served free." Or, above the small wooden platform that crosses a ditch between the road and the powerhouse: "World's most northerly bridge. Made in Alert by Joe and Scotty."

The camp is home to about 200 servicemen and six Eskimos. The Eskimos are volunteers who put in six months as heavy equipment operators and kitchen helpers. But the service-

men are not volunteers; they have all been ordered to do a six-month stint. And since most of them come from a small core of highly specialized personnel, some are on their second or third visit. One man has been posted to Alert six times.

When a man is going to Alert he is given thorough medical and dental examinations. Then he flies from Ottawa's Uplands airport on the weekly supply flight. Only a handful of ships have ever managed to get through the sea ice to Alert. (One of them, HMS Alert, which reached nearby Cape Sheridan in 1875, gave its name to the base.) Since the ice makes supply by sea undependable, the base is completely air supplied.

The arriving serviceman makes the two-mile trip from the landing strip at Alert to the camp in a snow vehicle and finds himself in a tiny colony of

buildings, all in an area smaller than a football field.

One of the buildings is the operations centre; the rest are the three messes (officers', sergeants' and other ranks'), the other ranks' recreation centre (with facilities for table tennis, darts, shuffleboard, pool and card games), the gymnasium, "the world's most northerly curling club" with two rinks, various service buildings and the huts where the men live. Each of the messes has its own bar.

The buildings are not connected. To get from one to another means bundling up in bulky Arctic clothing, which must all be stripped off when you reach the stiflingly warm interior of another building.

Each living hut has seven two-man rooms and a glance into any of them quickly reminds you that this is a world of men only. For Alert has



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Isolation can make or break a man—and the men know it

some of the finest, most imaginative and most lurid collections of pin-ups in the world.

Dotted among the pin-ups are pictures of wives and children and girlfriends. When a man has his photograph taken in his room to send home, his problem is to artfully exclude the pin-ups while showing that his family snapshots have pride of place.

Each new arrival gets a fact sheet headed "Welcome to Alert" which informs him: "On the average in any year there are about 28 days when the temperature is above 32 degrees . . . Weather can change very rapidly, so always dress for the worst when leaving the immediate area of the camp." Mean daily temperatures (the midpoint between the daily highs and lows) for January are 28 below, and 27 below during February and March. While there are 145 days of winter darkness, the summer brings 147 days of perpetual daylight. It snows nearly every month, even in July and August.

The fact sheet echoes the pride if not the joy of the men in being where they are. "We are 7°29'54" from the North Pole. This is equal to 518.06 statute miles, but it sounds better to call it 450 nautical miles (a shade

under). Alert is east of Halifax yet Edmonton is our nearest city." Halifax is 2,600 miles away and Edmonton 2,160. Moscow (2,430 miles) is closer to Alert than either Montreal (2,510 miles) or Toronto (2,700 miles).

It isn't long before the newcomer encounters the camp's white Arctic wolves. A pack of them lives just outside the base, making frequent forays to the nearby dump and even wandering into the complex itself to get at garbage. Some of the men are nervous about them and the camp has Eskimo huskies to try to keep them out. But the huskies are not too successful; they prefer, it seems, to make love, not war.

Corporal Brian Hartnett, a 26-year-old navy radio operator with a curly black beard, looks after the camp's five surviving huskies. The week before I arrived one female husky had to be shot after the wolves had ripped open her stomach. Another dog, Baron, had 80 stitches put in his throat after he got into a fight with a wolf last spring.

"They spend most of their time playing together," says Hartnett, "and that wolf pack has a couple of pups following them around right now that have got to have been fathered by Baron. Some protector he is."

Another familiar wildlife sight around the camp, even in winter, is white Arctic hares. In the summer, white Arctic foxes are common and there are occasional sightings of musk-oxen and polar bear. The men are not allowed to hunt because the area is a wildlife preserve. But in the summer they frequently go ice fishing on

nearby Little and Big Dumbell lakes for Arctic char which the cookhouse cooks for them.

The men at Alert have two morale-sustaining lifelines to the outside world. They are the weekly plane with its mail and the camp's ham radio station. Using the call sign VE8RCS, the ham station operates around the clock. Many of the radio operators working in the operations centre are enthusiastic hams who make regular contact with other hams around the world.

But the ham station's role is more vital than that. I was in the cookhouse, eating lunch, when the telephone rang and a cook answered. "Hey, Joe," he shouted to a bearded soldier, "you'd better get right over to the ham shack. Your wife's on the line." Joe didn't hesitate, he left his meal and ran, grabbing his outer clothing from a peg near the door.

The ham station contacts fellow hams in cities "down south," who make what are called telephone "patches" or hook-ups with nearby wives, parents and girlfriends. Servicemen at Alert are able to talk to a relative or girlfriend at least once a week.

"The radio and the hams are tremendous morale boosters," says Hartnett, the husky-master. "Take me, for example. Since I've been here my eldest daughter has broken her leg and my youngest has had pneumonia. I don't suppose I could have been all that much help to my wife even if I'd been home in Gander [Newfoundland], but just being able to talk with her helped us both more than any letters could ever have."

There is another radio station at

Alert. "ARS, Alert Radio Station, station of the frozen chosen, operating on four powerful watts," as the DJs, who operate it 24 hours a day in their spare time, say.

It welcomes newcomers to Club 183 (the number of days each man serves at Alert) and plays records for them like "Smile" and "Welcome To My World." It also broadcasts the weekly winner of the Alert Ding-a-ling of the Week Award, which goes to people like the unfortunate driver who smashed a snow vehicle into a building.

The busy season at Alert is in the summer months when the major supplies are flown in and additional personnel come in to do construction and maintenance work. Then, with the sun shining around the clock and most of the snow melted off the rocky ground, the men can make short trips outside the camp.

But in October the sun appears for the last time. It is a melancholy moment for the dozen or so men who stand outside and watch it make its brief, five-minute appearance above the horizon before setting for nearly six months.

Then the monotony of the winter begins and time drags as the camp settles into its lonely dark period. Outside activity is sharply curtailed because of the dark and the cold. All the men can see outside are the squat ugly outlines of the camp's buildings and the white steam from heating systems blowing across the sky.

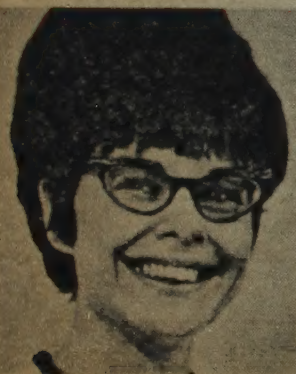
In the winter the weather can deteriorate with astonishing suddenness and every building has a weather condition sign at every entrance. When

Belvedere Smokers win *biggest cash prizes!* ★

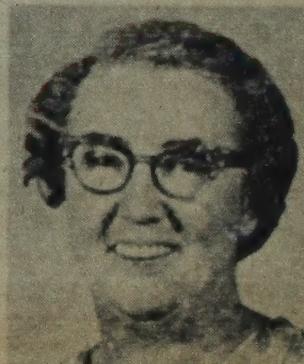
Canadians all
across Canada are
winning!

Now every Instant Gift from Belvedere is Instant Cash—big cash! And now there are Instant Cash Certificates in two big prize denominations—\$2,500 and \$25,000. Either way, Belvedere winners are big money winners. Instant Cash Certificates from Belvedere—right out of the blue!

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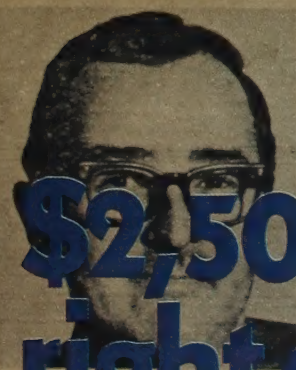
WINS \$25,000
Mrs. Joanne Thomas
of Hamilton, Ont.



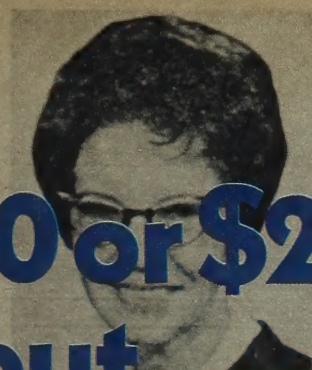
WINS \$2,500
Mrs. W. Sullivan
of Saint John, N.B.



WINS \$2,500
Mr. O. Lakusta
of Edmonton, Alta.



WINS \$2,500
Mr. Robert Tison
of Victoria, B.C.



WINS \$25,000
Mrs. Pat Parker
of Brandon, Man.



WINS \$2,500
Mr. Ernest Tremblay
of Dolbeau, P.Q.



WINS \$2,500
Mrs. H. M. Brede
of Ottawa, Ont.



WINS \$25,000
Mr. Alfred Lambert
of Pointe aux Trembles, P.Q.

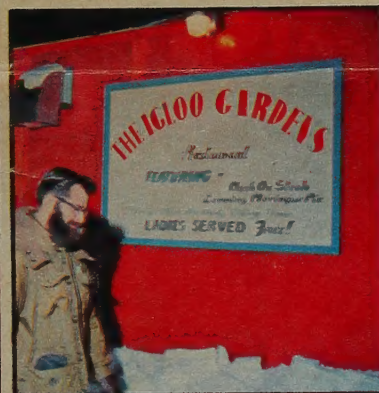
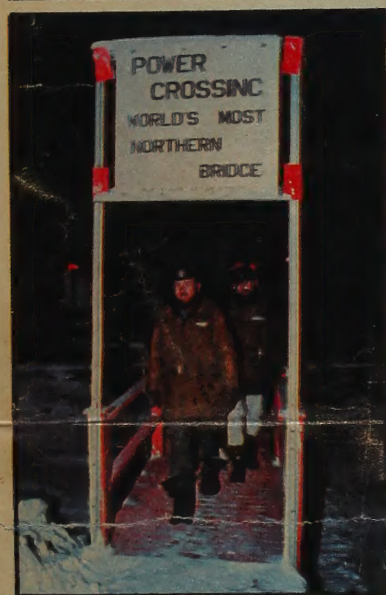


"I still say,
I smoke them
because I like them."



**\$2,500 or \$25,000
right out
of the blue!**





Like their counterparts of the Second World War, the troops at Alert rely heavily on signs as a morale booster. Below, a link with home – the dry canteen.



Every man keeps a calendar with his 183-day hitch marked out

the winds send snow blowing to the point where it becomes difficult to see more than 75 feet between the buildings the "all clear" comes down and a "condition one" goes into effect. Life lines are slung between buildings and no one is allowed to leave a building unless he is in full Arctic clothing and accompanied by at least one other person. A "condition two" closes the camp down and nobody leaves a building for any reason until the storm abates.

The weekly plane brings in newspapers, magazines, books, films, and month-old CBC films of football and hockey games. The men saw the first moon walk almost two months after it happened. Rug hooking, leathercrafts and photography are popular hobbies, and the gymnasium gets good use, although no body-contact sports are allowed, to reduce the chance of serious injury and the need to evacuate a man by air.

Alert has no doctor, although the medical assistant, Master Warrant Officer Jack Strachan, is "Doc" to everybody. "If we have a real emergency we can have a plane on the way here from Thule or Ottawa in very short order," he says. "If I need expert medical advice I can have a doctor on the radio in minutes."

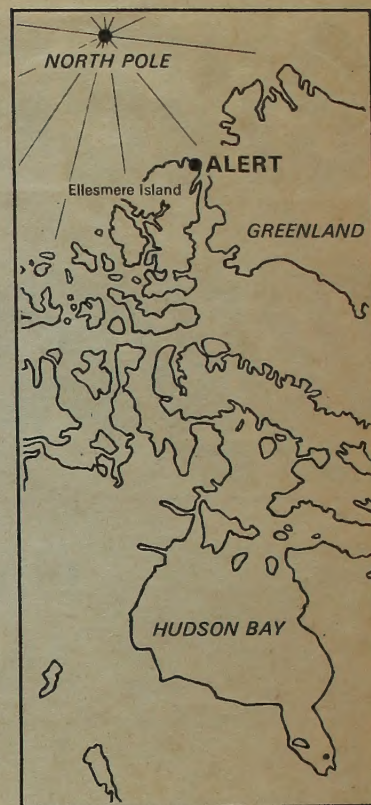
Doc Strachan, like most people at Alert, tries to treat his situation with a little humor. Next to an anatomical chart in his office is a sign which says simply: "Sex relieves tension."

However, he admits that Alert's isolation and rigorous climate, along with family separation and domestic worries, can cause serious problems for some men. "All I can do then," he says, "is sit down and talk it out with them. Nobody likes coming up here and a sympathetic talk is sometimes all that's needed to get somebody through to the end of his six months."

While Alert is generally conceded to be the worst place to which Canadian servicemen are posted, it must be also the only place where the men have nothing but praise for their cooks.

The cookhouse never closes and a man can stop in at any time for a coffee and sandwich. The menu always has at least three choices. If a man wants something else he can, within reason, have it. If he wants more food, he can have second or third helpings.

Fresh food is flown in weekly and



cold storage is no problem at Alert. Bread and pastries are prepared daily and salads and fruit are always available. The men also get the extra daily food ration given to all servicemen in the Far North.

"We feed for the climate and the isolation," says Sergeant Max Burden, one of the cooks. "Down south you wouldn't want to eat so much. But up here in this weather you need nourishing meals to keep warm."

Even though the armed forces make continuing improvements to the base's living and recreational facilities, Alert is not the kind of place where a man volunteers to stay.

Every man keeps a calendar with his 183 days carefully marked out. Some even work out the number of hours, and there have been individuals who have broken their six months down into minutes and seconds.

One of the saddest sights at Alert is to see the look on a man's face when the weekly supply plane takes off and heads south into the dark of the noon-day sky, on its way back to Ottawa.

In every building, bearded men stop what they are doing for a few moments to listen to the receding sound of the engines. If they are outside, they pause in the cold and watch the disappearing navigation lights.

Each man knows that later that day the plane's passengers will be in a bustling familiar world of men and women and children, a world of trees (the nearest to Alert are 2,000 miles away), and a world in which they will be seeing daylight the very next day.